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ABSTRACT

A fall 1989 nationwide survey of General Educational Development (GED) Tests candidates examined schooling experiences, study patterns, and educational plans. Findings indicated the GED Tests attracted more young adults than older adults, more older women than older men, and equal numbers of young adult men and women. Seven percent of candidates, or an estimated 43,000, reported they had a disability. The most prevalent disabilities reported were health impairments including arthritis, diabetes, or other chronic illnesses; specific learning disabilities; and orthopedic handicaps. Nearly 7 of 10 candidates had completed 10th grade or higher. More than three of four reported earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better. Candidates aged 18 to 24 reported higher levels of schooling than other age groups. Female, older, and minority candidates were more likely to report earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better. Most candidates (84 percent) studied before taking the GED Tests. Women and older candidates were more likely to study. Most important reasons for taking the GED Tests were academic, employment, and personal. More candidates planned to enroll in community or junior colleges than in any other type of educational institution. (11 references) (YLB)

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GED Profiles: Adults in Transition

GED TESTING SERVICE OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION • JANUARY 1991 • NO. 2

Schooling, Study, and Academic Goals: The Education of GED Candidates

by Janet Baldwin

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

- Nearly half (46 percent) of all candidates who studied for the GED Tests in 1989 reported they attended formal instructional programs before taking the tests. More than half (54 percent) chose other study methods. Candidates' choices of study methods are shaped by access to and awareness of study programs, personal preferences, and other factors. **Program planners should consider these factors and provide varied programs, flexible scheduling, and self-paced study options for adults.**
- Seven percent of candidates surveyed in 1989 reported having a disability. People with disabilities are more likely than others to be high school dropouts and thus could benefit from the GED Tests. **Educators and counselors should inform these candidates that special test editions, as well as accommodations in testing procedures, are available for persons with documented disabilities. Program developers and publishers should provide alternative instructional materials for adults whose disabilities limit their ability to read ordinary print.**
- More than four in five candidates (84 percent) reported studying for the GED Tests. Women were more likely to study than men; older candidates were more likely to study than younger candidates. Older adults who studied for the GED Tests may have needed more review than younger candidates, due to the longer passage of time since formal schooling. **Academic counselors must evaluate both the perceived and actual entry-level skills of candidates and recommend appropriate study methods. Administrators should evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs in terms of candidates' entry-level skills.**
- Three in ten candidates (31 percent) reported plans to enroll at a community or junior college in the next year. An additional 11 percent planned to enroll in a four-year college or university. A recent national literacy study found that attainment of the GED diploma can indicate higher literacy skills. **Colleges and universities can look to the GED Tests as indicators of achievement in writing, reading, and mathematics.**

The findings presented in this report are based on a fall 1989 nationwide survey of GED candidates. The findings describe candidates' schooling experiences, methods of study, and educational plans. Information about candidates' age, sex, race and disabilities is also presented.

During 1989, 682,728 people took the GED Tests at more than 3,400 testing locations throughout the world. Of these, 614,142 took the English-language edition in the United States and its territories. In the discussions below, estimates of population size are based on percentages from the 1989 survey as applied to the total number of candidates taking the English-language tests in the United States and its territories in 1989.

Issue Highlights:

- Most candidates are under the age of 25.
- Candidates aged 18-24 reported higher levels of schooling than other age groups.
- Older and minority candidates were more likely than other groups to report earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better.

Janet Baldwin, Ph.D., is Assistant Director for Policy Research with the GED Testing Service.

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Demographic Background

The following information describes candidates' age, race, and sex. Additional demographic findings are reported in **GED Profiles: Adults in Transition**, Number 1 (September 1990).

- **In 1989, more than three out of five candidates (62 percent) were under the age of 25. About half of all candidates (51 percent) were between the ages of 18 and 24. The percentages of candidates in older age groups declined with age—from 22 percent aged 25 to 34, to 1 percent aged 55 and older** (Figure 1).

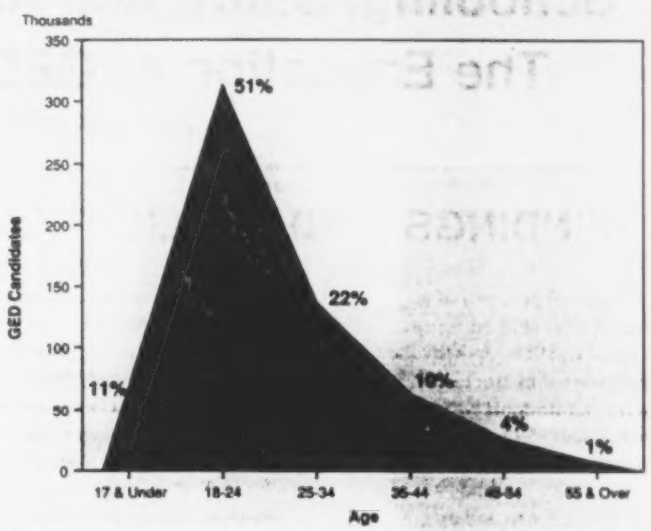
- **Women represented more than half of the candidates surveyed (56 percent). Of candidates under the age of 25, however, men and women were nearly equally represented—48 percent of those 17 and under and 51 percent of those 18 to 24 were men. In all other age groups, the proportion of women increased with age—from 62 percent of those aged 25 to 34, to more than 70 percent of those aged 35 and older** (Figure 2).

- **About one in four candidates aged 17 and younger (26 percent) were minorities. The proportion of candidates aged 18 to 44 who were members of a minority group increased to three in ten (about 31 percent). The percentage of older minority candidates decreased to 20 percent of those aged 45 to 54 and to 9 percent of those aged 55 and older.**

The GED Tests attracted more young adults than older adults, more older women than older men, and equal numbers of young adult men and women. Three in ten candidates aged 18 to 44 were minority group members.

Figure 1

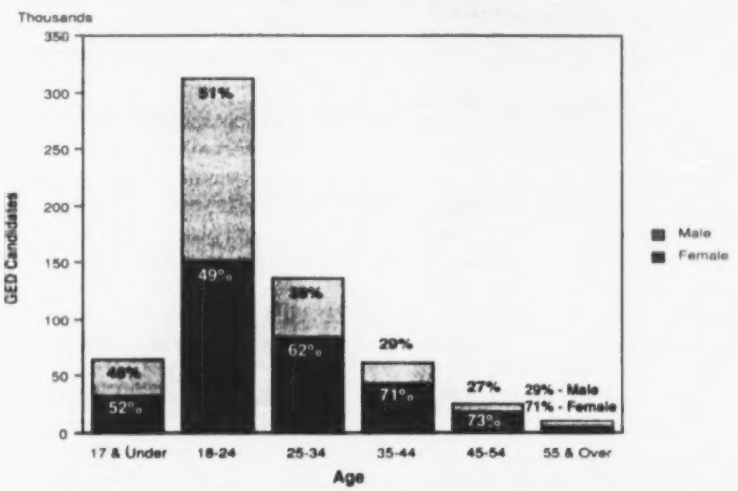
GED TESTING VOLUME IN 1989 BY AGE



Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey and 1989 Annual Statistical Report, American Council on Education

Figure 2

POPULATION OF MEN & WOMEN GED CANDIDATES BY AGE



Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey and 1989 Annual Statistical Report, American Council on Education

GED Profiles: Adults in Transition

GED Profiles: Adults in Transition is a series of policy-relevant reports based on research about an important segment of the adult learner population: persons who take the GED Tests. Published by the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education (ACE), the series is available for $65 from:

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Janet Baldwin, *Editor*

Candidates with Disabilities

People with disabilities are more likely than others to be high school dropouts. Further, disabled students tend to drop out of high school at higher rates than their nondisabled peers. Therefore, disabled dropouts could benefit from adult programs for high school completion, such as the GED Tests.

- **In 1989, 7 percent of candidates surveyed, or an estimated 43,000, reported that they had a disability. The percentage who reported disabilities increased with candidates' age, from 3 percent of those aged 17 and younger to 18 percent of those aged 55 and older** (Figure 3).

- **One in five disabled candidates reported having a "specific learning disability" (19 percent). The same proportion reported having an "orthopedic handicap" (18 percent). One in three (33 percent) specified "other health impairment"** (Table 1).

- **More than one in eight disabled candidates reported they were "hard of hearing" (13 percent), while about one in 10 reported having an "emotional disability" (11 percent) or a "visual handicap (not correctable by glasses)" (9 percent). Four percent reported having a "speech disability" and two percent reported "deafness"** (Table 1).

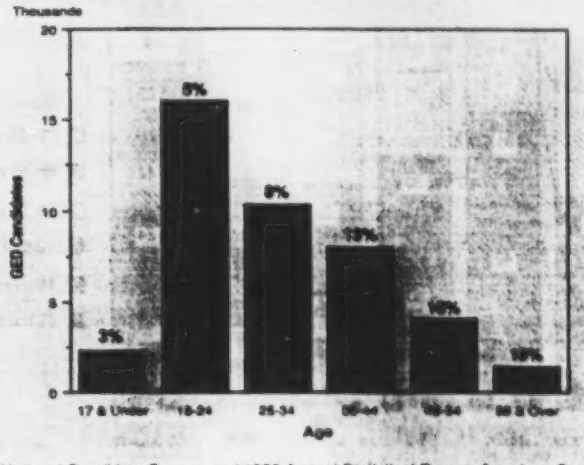
Recent studies suggest that 33 million Americans have some type of activity limitation that results from a chronic condition. The most prevalent disabilities reported by candidates in 1989 were other health impairments, which include arthritis, diabetes, or other chronic illnesses requiring medication; specific learning disabilities; and orthopedic handicaps.

An estimated 43,000 candidates in 1989 had disabilities. However, fewer than 3,200 requested special editions of the GED Tests (Braille, large print, or audio casette) or special accommodations in testing procedures. Some candidates with documented disabilities may not know that accommodations or special editions of the GED Tests are available and, therefore, do not request special testing. The educational needs of disabled candidates present special challenges and opportunities for policymakers. Disabled candidates may need special counseling and accommodations not only in testing but also in instruction.

A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that 10 percent of the 12.5 million postsecondary students in fall 1986 reported having at least one disabling condition. This study found that 8 percent of disabled postsecondary students were GED graduates, while 4 percent of nondisabled postsecondary students held GED diplomas. The GED Tests provide an important avenue for educational advancement to disabled adults who did not complete high school. Colleges and universities can improve access for these students by creating a supportive climate and finding ways to ease their transitions to campus.

Figure 3

GED CANDIDATES REPORTING DISABILITIES BY AGE GROUP



Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey and 1989 Annual Statistical Report, American Council on Education

Table 1

DISABLED GED CANDIDATES BY DISABILITY IN PERCENTS

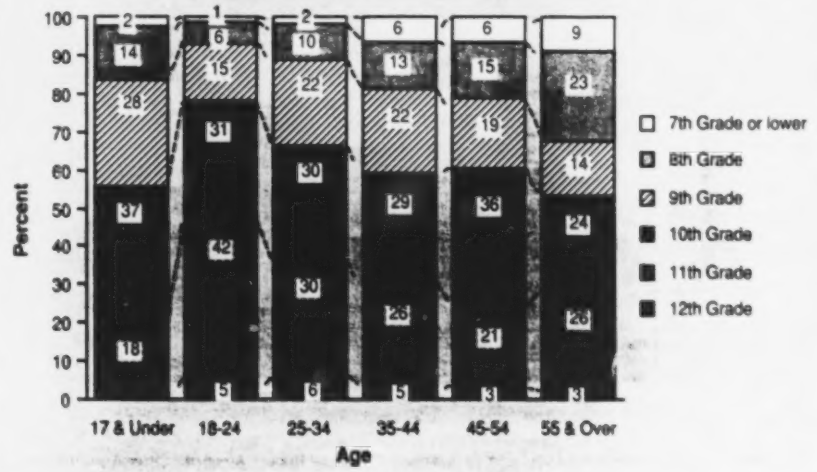
	Percent*	(estimated number)
Specific learning disability	19%	(8,211)
Visual handicap (not correctable by glasses)	9	(3,955)
Hard of hearing	13	(5,632)
Deafness	2	(731)
Speech disability	4	(1,677)
Orthopedic handicap	18	(7,738)
Emotional disability	11	(4,729)
Other health impairment	33	(14,316)

* Percents are of candidates reporting disabilities. These numbers sum to more than 100 because candidates reported all disabilities that applied.

Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey and 1989 Annual Statistical Report, American Council on Education

Figure 4

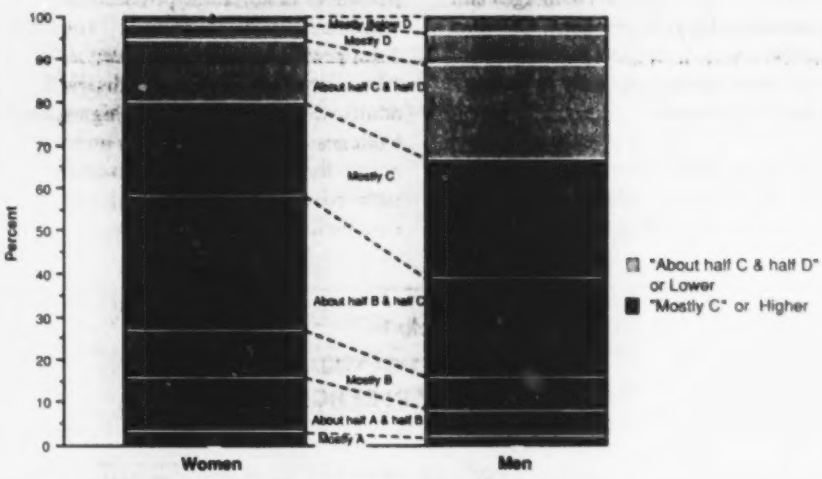
PERCENT OF GED CANDIDATES COMPLETING GRADE BY AGE GROUP



Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey, American Council on Education

Figure 5

PERCENT OF MEN & WOMEN GED CANDIDATES REPORTING IN-SCHOOL GRADES



Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey, American Council on Education

Schooling

Nearly seven in ten GED candidates in 1989 had completed tenth grade or higher. More than three in four reported earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better. However, there were notable differences between men and women, and among candidates of different age and racial groups.

Highest grade completed:

- **Men were more likely (72 percent) than women (68 percent) to have completed tenth grade or higher.**
- **Candidates aged 18 to 24 reported higher levels of formal schooling than any other age group: nearly four in five (78 percent) reported having completed tenth grade or higher before leaving school, and nearly half (47 percent) reported completing eleventh grade or higher** (Figure 4).
- **The percentages of candidates in other age groups who reported completing tenth grade or higher ranged from a high of 66 percent of those aged 25 to 34 to a low of 53 percent of those aged 55 and older** (Figure 4).
- **Nearly nine out of ten Asian/ Pacific Islander candidates (87 percent) and four out of five Black candidates (79 percent) reported having completed tenth grade or higher, higher proportions than among White (68 percent) or Hispanic (66 percent) candidates .**

Most candidates reported having attained relatively high levels of formal schooling before dropping out of high school. About half of all adults who took the GED Tests (51 percent) were between 18 and 24 years of age; these adults reported even higher levels of formal schooling than other age groups.

A recent national study of young adult literacy found that young adults who spent more time in formal schooling activities achieved higher levels of literacy skills than those who completed fewer years of school. Most young adults who take the GED Tests have attained relatively high levels of formal schooling.

Grades while in school:

- **Women (80 percent) were more likely than men (67 percent) to report earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better** (Figure 5).
- **Older candidates were more likely than younger candidates to report earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better. The proportion of candidates reporting these grades increased with age from 68 percent of those aged 17 and younger, to 91 percent of those aged 55 and older.**
- **Asian candidates (84 percent), Black candidates (82 percent), and Hispanic candidates (78**

percent) were more likely than White candidates (72 percent) to report in-school grades of "mostly C" or better.

Women candidates, older candidates, and minority candidates were more likely than other groups to report earning in-school grades of "mostly C" or better. However, it is not known to what extent candidates' reported in-school grades correspond to their actual in-school grades.

Candidates' Study Patterns

Most candidates (84 percent) chose to study before taking the GED Tests. This percentage represented 515,000 candidates in 1989. Candidates' choices of study method included formal instruction—such as GED review classes or learning centers—as well as studying from a GED book or manual, taking the Official GED Practice Tests, working with a tutor, or some other method.

Who studied? (Table 2)

- **Women were more likely (87 percent) than men (80 percent) to report studying for the tests.**
- **Four in five candidates (about 80 percent) aged 24 and younger reported studying. For older candidates, the proportion was even higher (about 90 percent).**
- **One in six candidates (16 percent) reported they did not review or study for the GED Tests. Of those aged 18 to 24, the proportion was one in five (20 percent), higher than for other age groups.**
- **There was relatively little difference in the likelihood of study among race and ethnic groups. At least four in five candidates of all race and ethnic groups reported studying for the GED Tests, from a low of 81 percent of Asian/ Pacific Islanders to a high of 88 percent of Blacks.**

At least eight out of every ten candidates reported studying or reviewing in some way for the tests and this proportion held regardless of sex, age group, or race. However, there were some differences worth noting. Older candidates were more likely to study than younger candidates, and women were more likely to study than men. Older adults who chose to study for the GED Tests may have needed more review than younger candidates, due to the longer passage of time since formal schooling. Moreover, older candidates reported having completed less formal schooling than younger candidates.

Compared to other age groups, candidates aged 18 to 24 were not only less likely to report studying, they also were more likely to report high levels of formal schooling. Candidates who reported they did not study for the GED Tests may have been more confident about their academic skills than those who did study.

How did they study?

- **Of candidates who studied for the GED Tests in 1989, one in three (34 percent), or an estimated 175,000 candidates, reported they attended GED review classes.**
- **More than one in ten candidates (12 percent), or an estimated 60,000 adults, attended a learning center to prepare for GED Tests.**
- **About one in four candidates (25 percent), or 127,000 adults, studied from a book or manual designed for GED study.**

Table 2

CANDIDATES WHO STUDIED FOR THE GED TESTS IN PERCENTS BY AGE, SEX, AND RACE

Category	Percent
All	84 %
17 and under	83
18-24	80
25-34	89
35-44	90
45-54	90
55 and over	89
Men	80
Women	87
Whites	83
Blacks	88
Hispanics	86
Asians/Pacific Islanders	81
Other	84

Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey, American Council on Education

What are the GED Tests and who takes them?

The General Educational Development (GED) Tests measure the major and lasting outcomes of a four-year high school program of study. The content of the tests corresponds to what graduating high school seniors are expected to know in the areas of writing, social studies, science, literature and the arts, and mathematics. Each year, nearly 700,000 people take the GED Tests. In 1989, more than 375,000 candidates passed the GED Tests.

By passing the GED Tests, adults earn high school diplomas and qualify for college enrollment, training programs, and job advancement. To qualify for a diploma, adults taking the GED Tests must surpass the performance of about 30 percent of a national sample of graduating high school seniors. One of every six high school diplomas awarded in the United States each year is based on the GED Tests.

- **Taking the Official GED Practice Test was the study method reported by more than one in six candidates (18 percent). This proportion represented 92,000 adults in 1989.**

- **Twelve percent of candidates who studied selected other methods, including working with a tutor, watching televised GED study programs, studying with a family member or friend, or talking with someone who had taken the tests.**

Nearly half of all candidates who studied (46 percent) reported attending formal instructional programs, such as a review class or a learning center. In 1988, more than 1 million adults participated in federally supported programs in adult secondary education and an unknown additional number attended local or state funded classes. While it is not known how many of those participating in these programs actually took the GED Tests, the rate of participation in formal study programs reported by candidates—estimated at 235,000 adults in 1989—suggests that nearly one in four adults who enroll in adult secondary education classes may actually take the tests in a given year.

More than half of all candidates who studied (54 percent), or an estimated 279,000 adults, chose methods of study other than formal instructional programs. Candidates' choices of study methods are shaped by their access to and awareness of study programs, work or home constraints, life stages or circumstances, the availability of transportation, personal preferences, and other factors. Classes or other instructional programs may be more attractive to candidates if they are offered in convenient locations and provide instruction at times that fit the candidates' work and home schedules. A recent study by Valentine and Darkenwald noted that varied and flexible scheduling and provisions for self-pacing can make education more accessible to adult learners.

ACADEMIC GOALS

Candidates were asked to report their most important reasons for taking the GED Tests as well as their educational plans for the next year.

Most important academic reason for taking the GED Tests:

- **More than one in five candidates in 1989 (22 percent) took the GED Tests to be admitted to a college or university. This represents an estimated 136,000 adults whose academic goals included attending a college or university.**

- **Nearly three in ten candidates aged 17 and younger (29 percent) and more than one in four candidates aged 18 to 24 (26 percent) took the GED Tests to be admitted to a college or university. This represented a total of 101,000 candidates under age 25 who took the tests for this reason. The proportion declined with age—from 29 percent of those aged 17 and younger, to 5 percent of those aged 55 and older.**

Candidates' most important reason for taking the tests included academic reasons as well as employment, personal, and other reasons. However, only academic reasons and educational plans are discussed here. Employment and other reasons for taking the tests and employment plans for the next year will be presented in a subsequent report.

Educational plans for the next year:

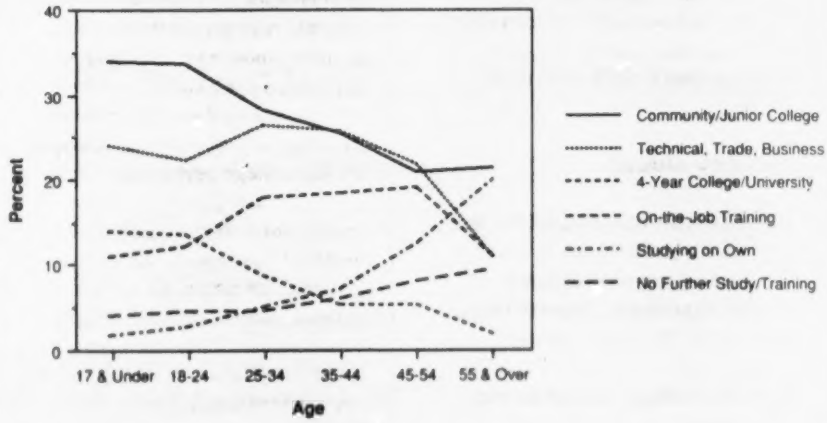
- **Three in ten candidates (31 percent), or an estimated 190,000 adults, reported plans to enroll at a community or junior college during the next year. The proportion remained high regardless of age group, from one in three aged 17 and younger (34 percent), to one in five aged 55 and older (21 percent)** (Figure 6).

- **One in ten candidates (11 percent), or an estimated 68,000 adults, planned to enroll at a four year college or university during the next year. This proportion declined with age—from 14 percent of those aged 17 and younger, to 2 percent of those 55 and older** (Figure 6).

- **Nearly one-half of candidates aged 18 to 24 (47 percent) reported plans to enroll in either a community or junior college (34 percent), or a four-year college or university (13 percent), during the next year. This represents an estimated 151,000 candidates of traditional college age who reported plans to**

Figure 6

GED CANDIDATES' EDUCATIONAL PLANS DURING NEXT YEAR IN PERCENTS BY AGE GROUP



Note: The category "other" is omitted from this figure.

Source: 1989 National Candidate Survey, American Council on Education

attend a two- or four-year college or university during the next year.

- **Nearly one in four candidates (25 percent) indicated plans to enroll at a technical, trade, or business school during the next year. This proportion was at least one in five for all age groups under age 55. Of candidates aged 55 and older, one in ten (11 percent) reported these plans.**

- **The percentage of candidates reporting plans to study on their own was 4 percent. This percentage increased with age—from 2 percent of candidates 17 and younger, to 20 percent of those 55 and older.**

More candidates planned to enroll in community or junior colleges than in any other type of educational institution. Candidates were less likely to report plans to enroll in a four-year college or university than in other educational institutions, yet in 1989 an estimated 68,000 planned to do so. The estimated number of candidates planning to enroll at either a two-year or four-year college during the next year was 258,000. Of this number, 151,000 candidates were aged 18 to 24. Colleges and universities should recognize that thousands of GED candidates every year are potential college students. As noted in a recent national literacy study of young adults, attainment of the GED diploma represents attainment of higher literacy skills. The GED Tests can serve as indicators of measurable achievement in writing, reading, and mathematics.

A high proportion of candidates in all age groups planned to enroll in a community or junior college during the next year, suggesting that the community college plays an important role in the educational plans of candidates of all ages. Younger candidates were more likely than older candidates to report plans to enroll in four-year colleges or universities.

GED candidates and graduates on college campuses may need support services and special programs that facilitate their transitions between school, home, and the workplace.

* * *

Notes: *Disabilities included specific learning disability, visual handicap (not correctable by glasses), hard of hearing, deafness, speech disability, orthopedic handicap, emotional disability, and other health impairment. Minority includes Hispanic, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native, American Indian, and other. Hispanics may be of any race and Hispanic candidates were excluded from racial categories.*

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Sources of Information for GED Profiles: Adults in Transition

In 1980, the GED Testing Service conducted a national survey of persons taking the English-language version of the GED Tests. A subsequent survey was conducted in 1989 to learn how GED candidates had changed and to provide an in-depth profile of candidates' attitudes, experiences, backgrounds, and goals. In 1989, the GED Testing Service also analyzed the recent test achievement of GED examinees and graduating high school seniors. The GED Profiles: Adults in Transition series is based on data from these studies and from statistical reports published in 1980 and in 1989. Technical documentation for the series is provided in GED Profiles: Technical Summaries, which contains descriptions of samples, instruments, and procedures, as well as tables of candidate responses to questions from the 1980 and 1989 candidate surveys. This document is available from the GED Testing Service.

Enclosed is your next issue of
GED Profiles: Adults in Transition

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